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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 004173

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SUBJECT: KUWAIT-IRAQ BORDER VISIT: OCTOBER 2006

REF: KUWAIT 3445

Classified By: CDA Matt Tueller for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On October 15, Econoffs and DHS officer visited Abdaly Border Crossing, Coalition Crossing, and Navistar on the Kuwait-Iraq border. Despite a number of cross-border incidents in August and September 2006 (reftel), activity at the border appeared calm due in part to the decrease in traffic during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. The anticipated opening of the Al-Kabari or K-Crossing, which will replace Coalition Crossing, has been delayed until at least February 2007. Further postponements are anticipated due to road construction delays on the Iraqi side of the border. In the interim, Coalition Crossing and Navistar will continue to operate at full staff. Army Support Group Kuwait (ASG-Kuwait) has also begun to issue a border crossing card that will be mandatory for all commercial drivers using Coalition Crossing effective November 1. Kuwait Immigration will have access to the ASG-Kuwait data collected for this card when K-Crossing opens. End summary.

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Abdaly Crossing: Civilian Gateway to Iraq  
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¶2. (SBU) On October 15, Emboffs visited Abdaly Border Crossing, a civilian traffic only facility located at marker number 91 on the Kuwait-Iraq border. Embassy officials met with and were escorted by Kuwait Customs Authority's Abdaly Port Director Judei Mzyed who has served on the border for more than 20 years. Mzyed stated that his top priority is narcotics detection, although he described drug seizures at Abdaly as fairly sporadic when compared to operations at Coalition Crossing (aka Navistar Southbound). Abdaly inspects all vehicles using the VICAS mobile x-ray unit and conducts hand inspections of all baggage to deter would-be smugglers. They also have radiation detectors.

¶3. (SBU) From Customs' inspection facilities, Mzyed escorted Embassy officials about a half mile to the border where a line of some 30-40 trucks were waiting to make their way into Iraq. Iraqi Customs officials were clearly visible less than 200 meters away, but Mzyed said there is no direct communication between the two sides. Communication, if necessary, is forwarded from border officials up their respective chains of command. Abdaly processes about 250-300 trucks a day, Mzyed said, most of which return empty after dropping off their cargo just over the border in Iraq. Many of the trucks waiting to make this crossing were overflowing with used and low-end furniture and carpets from Kuwaiti merchants, along with water and other beverages. There were also numerous trucks transiting Kuwait carrying Saudi cement into Iraq. Mzyed described the cement shipments as a common occurrence, which seemed ironic as Kuwaitis are not allowed to ship cement to Iraq because it is in short supply in

Kuwait.

14. (C/NF) Comment: There is reason to be concerned about the integrity of some Customs inspectors and members of upper management at Abdaly. A regular courier known to Customs officials at Abdaly was recently stopped with over 1.2 million USD hidden in the roof of his car. The courier had declared 50,000 USD upon entry. Despite the courier's obvious guilt, a number of Customs' officials, including the Area Port Director in-charge of both Abdaly and Salmi (Kuwait-Saudi border) crossings lobbied for his release. The Director General of Customs intervened directly to ensure pursuit of the case. End comment.

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K-Crossing: Opening Spring 2007?  
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15. (C/NF) Emboffs then proceeded to Coalition Crossing (aka Navistar Northbound and Southbound) where they were received by U.S. Army and Navy Customs officials, including the Navistar Camp Commander. The commander confirmed that the opening of K-Crossing has been pushed back to February 2007 due primarily to delays in the construction of the 109km access road on the Iraqi side of the border. To date, only 9km have been completed. On the Kuwait side, the commander noted that the northbound side of Al-Kabari or K-Crossing was complete, but inspection booths and asphalt are still being installed on the southbound side. (Comment: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) attributes the delay to problems with the Iraqi contractor. As a result, USACE anticipates a July 2007 opening. End comment.) Despite the delays, the commander believed that K-Crossing, once operational, would be a state-of-the-art facility for military convoys that

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would allow for substantial improvement in cross-border flow.

16. (QF) One known challenge will be a one-way flow of traffic into K-Crossing because of standard width two-lane access roads on both sides of the border and a narrow passage way at the border itself. During a trial run on the Kuwait access road the mirrors of two Heavy Equipment Transporters (HETs) traveling in opposite directions actually touched. The commander was unaware of any plans to widen the road on either side of the border, although the Iraqi side is still under construction. (Comment: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reports that CFLCC command considered widening the road, but decided after analysis to leave the road at standard width due to the temporary nature of the requirement for a non-standard road. End comment.) To compensate, convoys will operate on a 12-hour north, 12-hour south schedule which will be controlled by the U.S. Army. In Kuwait, Camp Virginia will have a key role as a staging point for these convoys. According to the commander, convoys will gather at Virginia, be registered, and will then move forward with a gun truck escort to K-Crossing. At the border he anticipates that the total transit time for Coalition vehicles will be about an hour. The commander added that there are currently no plans for life-sustaining facilities such as restaurants and housing because overnight stays at the border are to be discouraged.

17. (C/NF) Another question to resolve is whether Kuwait will allow civilian traffic from Iraq to enter through K-Crossing. If a civilian is turned away from K-Crossing and directed instead to Abdaly Crossing, this could expose the traveler to a dangerous journey through southern Iraq. Post will take up this and other issues with the GOK.

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K-Crossing Border Card Effective November 1  
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18. (SBU) Effective November 1, per order of Army Support Group Kuwait (ASG-Kuwait), all commercial drivers using

Coalition Crossing, and eventually K-Crossing, will be required to present an ASG-Kuwait issued border card. This card is designed to facilitate the flow of traffic by pre-registering drivers in a central database to which Kuwait Immigration will have access when K-Crossing becomes operational in Spring 2007. Each card has a barcode which will allow access to the holder's photo and biographic information.

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Coalition Crossing: Last in, Last out  
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19. (C/NF) Until K-Crossing is operational, Coalition Crossing will continue to handle Coalition traffic, military and contractor, crossing into and out of Iraq. During this visit, Emboffs observed approximately two hundred trucks lined up and waiting for inspection. The backlog was apparently caused by the Ramadan schedule of the Kuwaiti Customs inspectors and was described as atypical. Emboffs also noticed about 30 battle-damaged tactical vehicles recently transported from Iraq. The transit of these items into and through Kuwait continues to be a sensitive issue for the GOK. In this particular case the Kuwait Environmental Protection Agency had not yet granted clearance for U.S. officials to move the vehicles away from the border area.

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